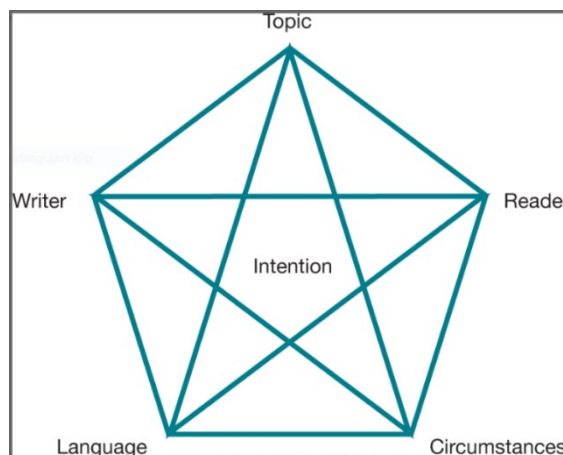


The rhetorical pentagon

A good framework for analysing non-fiction texts. It is an age-old model based on ideas by the Roman politician and rhetorician Cicero (106-43 BCE), who suggested that there are five elements involved in the communication between people. The model therefore has five angles (pénte is Greek for five), and each element is connected to the other four elements, as shown in the [diagram](#). The five elements are:

- **Topic**
- **Writer**
- **Circumstances**
- **Reader**
- **Language**

While you examine the five elements, you must keep in mind what the writer wants to achieve. Therefore, the sixth element in the analysis is the writer's **intention**. Keep in mind: Your understanding of the writer's intention should guide your analysis of the other five elements.



Topic

Begin your analysis by **characterising the topic** of the text. For example, if the topic is assisted suicide, you may write down adjectives like *taboo* or *controversial*. To do this you have to read the whole text.

Writer

Gathering information about the writer is essential for understanding why the text was written and possibly also why it was written the way it was. Elements such as the **writer's age, gender, education, professional background, occupation, and religious and political orientation**, especially if the writer uses his or her person directly or indirectly in the text.

Circumstances

Why has the writer chosen to write this particular text at this particular time, and in what way(s) has this situation influenced the text? What are the reasons for doing so? Is it external or internal circumstances or some other kind of motivation. The reasons may be personal, for example an unhappy love relationship or something that triggers an emotional response. It may also be an event – it could be the result of a football match or a presidential election. Again, it may also be political indignation, e.g. poor housing conditions for students, or a wish to change people's attitudes to driving cars using fossil fuels.

Reader

Very few people write without having an audience in mind.

- Who is the explicit or intended receiver or audience.
- Is there an implicit audience, a secondary audience – if the text is written for a specific audience but is expected to be read (heard, watched) by others, for example on TV?
- What do we know about the intended readers' background: education, age, gender, religious or political point of view?
- How does what we know about the readers' background affect the writer's options? For example, are the readers likely to agree or disagree with the writer?

Language

Examining the language of the text is essential for an analysis of a non-fiction text. Some of the points you may include when you analyse the language are:

- Structure, division into paragraphs
- Syntax and punctuation: is it simple, complex, paratactic, hypotactic?
- Vocabulary – informal, formal, neutral, concrete, abstract
- Connotations: do words or phrases in the text produce negative or positive associations in the individual reader?
- Dialect and sociolect – does the writer's dialect or sociolect reveal something about what he or she wants to say?
- Use of quotations – does the writer use quotations or references to back up his points?
- Rhetorical features – use of metaphors, repetition, etc.
- Modes of persuasion – ethos, logos and pathos

The writer's intention

Throughout your analysis of the text, you have kept in mind the writer's intention and how this intention influences the rhetorical choices the writer makes. Now you are ready to sum up the analysis and answer the question: Why has the text been written?

- to inform
- to draw attention to a particular issue
- to educate
- to entertain
- to provoke
- to explain
- to persuade
- to criticise
- to promote the writer

Has the writer been successful in presenting his or her views? This involves a critical evaluation of the quality of the writer's efforts.

The rhetorical pentagon – Checklist

- What characterises the topic of the text?
- Who is the writer? What can you find out about his or her background, education, views, etc. (that might have affected his or her rhetorical choices)?
- What are the circumstances of the text?
- Who are the intended readers of the text? Is there a secondary audience?
- What characterises the language? (syntax, vocabulary, style, rhetorical features, etc.)
- What is the intention of the text? (to inform, to entertain, to provoke, to persuade, etc.)